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65-336 E.O.

23 January 1965

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Meeting with Admiral Sharp, CINCPAC, on
19 January 1965

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1. I met with Admiral Sharp, CINCPAC, at 0930 on 19 January 1965. Attending with me were [redacted] and Knoche. Also in attendance were Lieutenant General Verdi Barnes, the CINCPAC Chief of Staff, and Brigadier General Grover Brown, the CINCPAC J-2.

2. I had previously sent to Admiral Sharp and General Brown copies of the OCI memorandum concerning the build-up of Communist forces in Laos. (This is the memo which the DCI had disseminated to top officials here in Washington for eventual consideration at a policy-level meeting.) Admiral Sharp and General Brown said they had read the memo, had found it interesting, and General Brown said that he concurred with the line taken. I pointed out that it was extremely difficult to determine Communist intentions in this matter. It was conceivable that the reinforcements were for defensive purposes but that of course the added strength might be preliminary to offensive actions within Laos or to the introduction of additional forces across the Lao border into South Vietnam. I said I believed that the Board of National Estimates and USIB would no doubt soon be coming to grips with a fresh estimate on all this and that I would see to it that CINCPAC was kept advised of our views as they developed.

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3. Admiral Sharp said it was also possible that the effects of the [redacted] raids in Laos were such that the Pathet Lao required some sort of stiffening and that the introductions of troops from North Vietnam could be related to this. Later in the conversation

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Admiral Sharp indicated that more information was required on the whereabouts, size, and type of the newly-arrived forces and that he thought low-level reconnaissance should be employed to get this information. He said he had often recommended low-level reconnaissance but that these recommendations had always been rejected on political grounds. He thought it would be extremely useful if USIB were to address this problem and to recommend use of low-level reconnaissance.

4. Admiral Sharp complained about an inability to get a good and precise feel for the situation in South Vietnam from current reporting, not only from the field but from elsewhere.

25X1 He thought that perhaps [redacted] was not receiving everything but he was assured that this was not the case. In answer to my question, the Admiral said that he does receive ExDis and LimDis State cables to and from Saigon but he said that there are obviously some categories that he does not see.

5. Sharp appeared a bit critical of MACV reporting. He characterized it as extremely optimistic. He asked for our views on the situation. [redacted] said that he regarded the Vietnamese situation as one of extreme seriousness and fragility. The

25X1 Admiral asked for an explanation, and [redacted] said it was his impression that the Viet Cong has the capability to mount as many as four or five Binh-Gia type operations simultaneously and this could severely strain South Vietnamese resources and assets. General Brown and Admiral Sharp both contested this, saying that it was clear that the South Vietnamese military had reacted poorly and executed plans ineffectively at Binh-Gia but that surely there were enough resources and assets available should the possibility of several simultaneous operations arise.

6. Admiral Sharp agreed that one serious possibility was a sudden uprising within Saigon which might even place the capital in the hands of the Communists. He said he had told MACV and Ambassador Taylor of his concern about this and that the people in Saigon are "cranking up" a contingency plan.

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7. I inquired about the Admiral's view on what to do about American dependents in Vietnam. He asked me to keep the matter entirely confidential but he told me that he had advised the JCS that it would be highly desirable to withdraw the dependents on the ground that the presence of so many inhibits the nature of military planning in the area, particularly when planning and considering strong retaliatory measures growing out of attacks on Americans or American installations.

8. My net impression of Admiral Sharp and his view of the South Vietnam situation is that he, like so many of the rest of us, finds it difficult to get a precise reading of the current situation and future outlook and he appears particularly frustrated by the political inhibitions placed upon his command which is responsible for military planning.

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Marshall S. Carter
Lieutenant General, USA
Deputy Director

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General Carter:

25X1 Mr. Knoche said that [redacted] has concurred in the attached Memo for the Record and recommends your signature.

Shall we send copies, on an Eyes Only basis, to:

DCI ✓
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Sherman Kent ✓

OK

Barbara (25 Jan)

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